AN ESSAY ON *KING LEAR*

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INTRODUCTION

A number of images of Shakespeare have been held in the last two centuries. The romantic view, prevailing especially in the 19th century, sets forth that he is a semi-god who has almost nothing to do with his Tudor background. In contrast with this, there has appeared in this century the opinion that Shakespeare is a mechanic whose works are no more than a product of the conventions of the age. Between these extreme poles variant figures of Shakespeare have emerged. It is difficult to judge fairly to what extent we should regard his works in the light of convention. T. S. Eliot justly warns us:

> The danger of studying him alone is the danger of working into the essence of Shakespeare what is just convention and the dodges of an overworked and underpaid writer; the danger of studying him together with his contemporaries is the danger of reducing a unique vision to a mode.[1]

Recently scholars have engaged themselves in studying the social and cultural background of the Elizabethan period and sometimes also the conditions of the stage and audience of those days. These are preliminaries indispensable to approaching Shakespeare's dramas. If we

[1] T. S. Eliot, Introduction to *The Wheel of Fire* by G. Wilson Knight, London, Methuen, 1956, p. xv.

know exactly the exterior elements which limited Shakespeare while he was writing—for example, the conditions of the theatrical company to which he belonged, we can estimate how far his plays arose from his inner necessity. The outward conditions have not yet been sufficiently investigated; more study is needed.

However, judging from what has been revealed so far, it may safely be said that Shakespeare's plays are not simple mechanical contrivances but make a coherent whole which reveals the development of his mind. Let me cite an example. One of the crucial moments in Shakespeare's career was the time when he stood on the threshold of the so-called last period of the romances. At times the epoch-making transition from tragedies to romances is attributed to the change in the taste of the audience and to the influence of other contemporary dramatists. However, if this is insufficient to explain the sudden change completely, it follows that the author's inner change might possibly play an important role in bringing about the transformation of the way of writing. It is true that Shakespeare's development is not so straightforward as Dowden once thought. For instance, we must note the probability that he wrote *Hamlet* and *Merry Wives of Windsor* in the same year.[1] Even so, reading his dramas in a rough chronological order, we cannot but feel that his works obviously reflect the growth of his view of life and man.

At the beginning of the 17th century Shakespeare's insight into man became notably acute. Tragedy is always concerned with the problem of evil. What ennabled him to write the four great tragedies was above all his mind's growing penetration into the evil reality beneath the appearance of good, into the conflict between the real truth and the seeming truth. If we compare *Hamlet* with an early lyrical tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, the deepening of Shakespeare's tragic vision is clear. The tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is merely derived from chance—the perverse destiny that the lovers belong to rival houses and such succeeding accidents as that which prevents Friar John from delivering Friar Lawrence's message to Romeo. *Romeo and Juliet* is primarily a tragedy

[1] I follow in this essay E. K. Chambers' dating. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, Vol. I, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1930.

of simple circumstances, an outward or exterior tragedy; it is a romantic hymn for " star-cross'd lovers." (The Prologue, 6)[1] On the other hand, *Hamlet* deals with the evil reality of man beneath a good pretense, the question of the discrepancy between appearance and reality.

The problem of the gap between appearance and reality, which was first raised in the ancient Greek Age, has been one of the recurrent themes of world tragedy. This question was, because of the current spirit, especially pressing in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Shakespeare lived in an age when there existed two conflicting views of the universe and man: an optimistic or orderly conception, and a pessimistic or chaotic one. Medieval Scholasticism considered man in relation to the hierarchical universe. Even Renaissance humanism, exalting human dignity, supported an optimistic view of man. On the contrary, the wretchedness of man was asserted by the new thoughts represented by Machiavelli, Montaigne, and other empirical scientists.[2] It was quite natural that Shakespeare, who lived in such an intellectual milieu, was absorbed in the question of the difference between what man ought to be and what he really is, the divergence between appearance and reality, in his " tragic period." *Hamlet* is the first full exploration of this theme in his dramas. Hamlet says, " Seems, madam! Nay it is; I know not seems." (I. ii. 76) The tragedy of Hamlet begins when Gertrude's adultery and Claudius' murder of the king awake him to the split between the real truth and the seeming truth. Formerly he was a typical Renaissance man who could believe that man is " like a god," " the paragon of animals! " (II. ii. 305, 306), but now he is forced to admit that a human being is nothing but a " quintessence of dust." (307) The main concern of the play is to probe the conflict between what man seems to be and what man really is.

It is probable that immediately after *Hamlet* Shakespeare wrote what

[1] All the passages of Shakespeare's plays, including *King Lear*, are quoted from the Tudor Edition of *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Peter Alexander, London and Glasgow, Collins, 1959.

[2] Hiram Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance*, New York, Grove Press, Evergreen Edition, 1960, passim. Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, New York, Macmillan, paperback edition, 1961, pp. 21–51.

is usually termed a problem play, *Troilus and Cressida*, in which the theme of the real truth and the seeming truth is again treated. The tragedy of Troilus lies in his discovery of the gap between what Cressida seems to be and what she really is. When her unfaithfulness is disclosed, he cries out: " this is, and is not, Cressid." (V. ii. 144) In *Measure for Measure*, which perhaps preceded *Othello*, Shakespeare raised the problem of outward show and inner truth through Angelo's hypocrisy. Probably in 1604–5 he wrote *Othello*, which revolves about this theme also. The tragedy of Othello consists in his incapability of distinguishing appearance from reality. As Iago rightly comments,

> The Moor is of a free and open nature
> That thinks men honest that but seem to be so, (I. iii. 393–4)

he is entirely deceived by the false pretense of Iago. Iago, a Machiavellian, reveals his appalling nature when he boasts, " I am not what I am." (I. i.66) Othello commits an irrevocable mistake of identity when he calls Iago " honest " and Desdemona " a whore."

Shakespeare reached his tragic summit in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. It is generally said that both were written during 1605–6 and that perhaps *King Lear* preceded *Macbeth*. However, judging from J. D. Wilson's hypothesis of revision,[1] it is not impossible to assume *King Lear* to be the last great tragedy. These two plays, which display Shakespeare's acute penetration into evil, develop the theme of appearance and reality to the full. Macbeth is a tragic victim who is deceived by appearance. He strives to acquire the crown because he mistakes it for reality. Once he gets the crown, however, he is led to discover that it is no more than a shadow without substance—" it [ambition] is but a shadow's shadow." (*Hamlet*, II. ii. 264) The main concern of the play is to trace the hero's gradual awakening to what he has done. Prevented from sleeping and

[1] See his introduction to *Macbeth*, Cambridge edition, 1947, pp. xxii–xlii. He claims that the 1606 *Macbeth* is a revised work, saying: " my guess is a very daring one, viz. that the earlier *Macbeth* was the next play undertaken after *Hamlet*, i.e., that it was written in the second half of 1601 or early in 1602." (p. xli) The theory that the 1606 *Macbeth* is a revised work seems highly probable, though when the earlier *Macbeth* was written is uncertain.

finally even from repenting, he falls into damnation.

Macbeth is the tragedy of a person who loses his self-identity, while *King Lear* tells of the hero's quest for identity. Here Shakespeare's search for the difference between appearance and reality reaches its culmination. Moreover, *King Lear* is more tragic than *Macbeth* in that the *Lear* universe into which the characters are thrown does not admit of optimism. In the world of *Macbeth* reality wins over appearance; on the contrary, in the *Lear* universe appearance seems predominant over reality. It is the horribleness of the world-picture presented in the play that makes *King Lear* the most tragic of all Shakespearean tragedies.

When we speak of *King Lear*, we may naturally think of *Timon of Athens*, whose resemblance to *King Lear* is often pointed out. Though the date of *Timon* is not fixed, it is possible, considering the close kinship of the themes of these two plays, to suppose that *Timon* is a stillborn twin of *King Lear*. Since *Timon* seems an unfinished play,[1] not a few critics have devoted themselves to conjecturing various reasons why Shakespeare stopped writing it. For example, even E. K. Chambers, who is always careful not to be subjective, suggests:

> . . . in the brain of Timon's creator some strange crisis is at hand. That the crisis took place is indisputable. With *Timon* pessimism ends abruptly. Between its temper and that of any of the work that followed it there is a spiritual gulf fixed. It is tempting to suppose that the deep waters closed over Shakespeare's head while he was still elaborating the play, and that when he faced the world once more in his new mood the inclination to finish the task had left him.[2]

Although we cannot easily decide why Shakespeare left the play unfinished, we may at least say with Chambers that pessimism ends abruptly with *Timon*. As Shakespeare's vision tends upward, he comes to undertake other type of plays than deep tragedy. *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* are transitional dramas from the four great tragedies to the romances. With them there stands before us Shakespeare who is no longer obsessed with the question of the difference between appearance

[1] Una Ellis-Fermor, "*Timon of Athens*: An Unfinished Play," *Shakespeare the Dramatist*, London, Methuen, 1961, pp. 158–76.

[2] E. K. Chambers, *Shakespeare: A Survey*, London, Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1925, p. 276.

and reality. He is entering on a new phase, his last.

Thus roughly surveying Shakespeare's development, we can well admit that *King Lear* has a crucial place in his inner biography. It is *King Lear* that crowns " the tragic period," revealing the final crystallization of his tragic vision. This essay is an attempt to throw a light on the zenith of Shakespeare's tragic vision by examining *King Lear* from two points of view: Lear's quest for identity, and the world-picture of the *Lear* universe.

Chapter I The Quest for Identity

One of the characteristics of the construction of *King Lear* is that at the very beginning Lear makes a crucial choice and after that the main concern of the play is the long course of his descent into suffering. In terms of dramatic structure, *King Lear* is thus quite different from such plays as *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, whose construction forms a pyramid of the rise and fall of the protagonist. For instance, in *Macbeth* the hero rises to the crown through the first two acts and then, with the escape of Fleance from the murderers in the third act as the turning-point, enters upon a downward course. On the other hand, it is in the first scene that Lear is at the top of his career; after that there occurs a downward process in which he no longer initiates action himself but remains a passive figure, moved by Goneril and Regan. Such an anomalous aspect of construction indicates that a special emphasis is placed on the inner change in the hero induced by the fall. It is true that usually tragedy is concerned with metaphysical problems and that their chief interest lies in tracing the transformation of the hero's vision. However, above all in *King Lear* the process of Lear's metaphysical or cognitive change forms the essential part.

In Act I, Scene i, Lear is presented as a spiritually blind king who completely lacks self-knowledge. He commits two errors because of his incapability of distinguishing between appearance and reality. First, he understands neither the danger of dividing his kingdom nor what abdication really means. The idea of dividing the kingdom is itself

unwise; it seemed especially so in Shakespearean age. In those days it was taken as a sin which was necessarily followed by national chaos and disorder, as is shown in *Gorboduc*. Moreover, Lear is not aware that he remains nothing but a figure-head without any real authority. He renounces the reality of kingly power and preserves only a hundred knights and the outward sign of kingship—"the name, and all th' addition to a king." (I. i. 135) Though he gives away real power, he continues to take himself for a real king. On the contrary, Goneril and Regan think that he is no longer a king worthy of the name. Goneril says,

> Idle old man,
> That still would manage those authorities
> That he hath given away! (I. iii. 17–9)

The contention between Lear and his elder daughters which arises afterwards is partly derived from the fact that he cannot at all grasp the real meaning of abdication.

Secondly, Lear makes a ridiculous love test, one which is often accused of being motiveless and unreal.[1] Unreal as it may be, however, it is not dramatically incredible. It serves to reveal Lear's preference for flattery and his lack of insight into reality. He is so blind that he asks his daughters to manifest their love for him not in deeds but in words. He believes that only those who love him can express "the words of love." (I. i. 185) Therefore, it is natural that such a simple man as Lear should expect that Cordelia, who loves him most, will utter the words of love more eloquently than the elder daughters. When he says,

> Tell me, my daughters—
> . . . . . .
> Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
> That we our largest bounty may extend
> Where nature doth with merit challenge. (I. i. 47–52)

[1] E.g. H. B. Charlton, *Shakespearian Tragedy*, Cambridge University Press, 1952, pp. 191–4, 204. He compares the love test of *King Lear* with that of *The Chronicle History of King Leir*, which is generally admitted to be one of the sources of the play. As regards the motive of undertaking the test, he asserts that the source play is more sensible than *King Lear*.

he is sure that Cordelia is the very person to whom the richest portion of the kingdom shall be given. Indeed, the text suggests that he has already divided the land into three parts before the play begins.[1] It is highly probable, then, that Lear has reserved the most valuable share for the youngest daughter, his "joy." (81) In fact, he says to Cordelia,

> what can you say to draw
> A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak. (84–5)

However, quite contrary to his expectation, she answers, "Nothing, my lord" (86) and continues to say,

> Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
> According to my bond; no more nor less. (90–2)

As to Cordelia's answer there are two different opinions. Some blame her for being proud, though true; others affirm that she is not proud, still less to be blamed. Her attitude in the first scene may be too tactless and even tough, but it cannot be criticized. Shakespeare's wish seems to make a sharp contrast between Cordelia's honesty and the hypocrisy of her sisters, between Cordelia's virtue and their vice. Throughout the play Cordelia is presented as the incarnation of filial love, while her sisters are incarnations of undutifulness and unnaturalness. The equivocal word "bond" quoted before seems to mean not so much a frigid obligation as a natural tie based on love.[2] It is remarkable that Shakespeare gives her a chance to disclose the true state of her mind to the audience in two explanatory asides before she answers "Nothing." The dramatist seems to stress the abundance of her love for Lear in the following two asides:

> What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent. (61)

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[1] See I. i. 1–6, 36–7.

[2] J. F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of "King Lear,"* London, Faber and Faber, paper-covered edition, 1962, p. 129. He defends Cordelia against the accusation of pride.

Cf. A. Sewell, *Character and Society in Shakespeare*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 60–3. In opposition to Danby, he insists that Cordelia must ask forgiveness for answering in an equivocal way.

Then poor Cordelia!
And yet not so; since I am sure my love's
More ponderous than my tongue. (75–7)

Moreover, notice the high praise of her by Kent and the King of France, the morally right judges in this scene. For instance, Kent in his farewell speech extols her as one who "justly think'st, and hast most rightly said!" (183) Cordelia is taken to be proud only by Lear, who is "rash" (295) and almost "mad" (145); the other characters do not utter a single word in criticism of her answer.

On account of his perverse self-will and "poor judgment" (290), Lear cannot see his daughters as they really are. Because he is deceived by appearances, he can penetrate neither the evil nature of Goneril and Regan lurking under a beautiful mask nor Cordelia's unpretentious truth. He hardly understands his own self: "he hath ever but slenderly known himself." (293) It is appropriate that the loyal Kent urges the spiritually blind king to "see better." (157) After Act I, Scene i, the layers of appearance are stripped for Lear one by one; this causes his gradual awakening to reality.

Now begins the manifestation of the evil nature of Goneril and Regan. The center of contention between Lear and them is a hundred knights, not only his retinue on a realistic level but also an emblem of his kingly power. The conflict between them is effectively focussed when they quarrel about the number of this train. The daughters demand that he should diminish the number from a hundred to fifty, twenty-five, and at last Regan says, "What need one?" (II. iv. 262) To support those knights—"riotous," if we believe Goneril's words in I. iii. 7—may be troublesome. Rational as their complaint against Lear seems to be, however, it cannot be said to be a "due complaint"[1] since the hundred knights are an essential part of Lear's compact with his daughters. Their inhumane rationalism is, like that of Edmund, regarded as harmful and evil throughout the play. Their cruel attitude to Lear, which is

[1] H. Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Vol. I., London, B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1958, p. 286. Emphasizing Lear's perversity, Barker defends Goneril and Regan. He asserts that these daughters are even "respectable" in Act I and II.

symbolically represented by their request that he should discharge his retinue, admits of no excuse at all.

On the other hand, however ungrateful Goneril and Regan may be, Lear himself does not wholly fail to deserve censure until the end of Act II.[1] He is in utter confusion at I. iv. and II. iv., where the contention between Lear and his daughters is described at the fullest. His mind precariously oscillates between rage and repentance, between self-righteousness and self-accusation. Sometimes he even comes to acknowledge his mistake of having rejected Cordelia: "I did her wrong." (I. v. 23) Out of an agony of repentance he cries out, striking his head:

> O Lear, Lear, Lear!
> Beat at this gate that let thy folly in
> And thy dear judgment out! (I. iv. 270–2)

Occasionally his insight into reality is deepened as in the following culminating lines:

> Reg. What need one?
> Lear. O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
> Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
> Allow not nature more than nature needs,
> Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady;
> If only to go warm were gorgeous,
> Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
> Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need—
> You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need. (II. iv. 262–70)

In the final two lines he becomes conscious that "true need" is not the hundred knights whom he has persistently demanded, but "patience." Here he becomes a pathetic hero who tries to embrace misfortune.

On the contrary, there are not a few occasions when he is as still infantile and at the mercy of wilful passions as he was in the first scene. For example, when he throws a terrible curse on Goneril (I. iv. 275–89;

[1] Cf. C. B. Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1960, pp. 186–9, 217, 330. In opposition to Barker, Watson finds no fault in Lear after I. i. He tries to defend Lear against an accusation of egoism on the grounds that in the Tudor period disobedience to parents could not be justified under any circumstances. However, his argument seems too formalistic to be persuasive.

II. iv. 160–66), the audience might possibly find difficulty in emotionally identifying themselves with the hero. In Acts I and II Lear is not always presented as a tragic figure who evokes our sympathy. This is indicated by the presence of the " bitter fool " (I. iv. 137), who is the climax of the clowns and fools created by Shakespeare. The antiphony between him and Lear is unforgettable. The Fool plays an important part in Lear's quest for identity. As he is an " all-licens'd fool " (I. iv. 199), he is the fittest person to criticize the king impartially. His role is to advance Lear's awakening to reality by revealing to him his folly in having discarded Cordelia and divided the kingdom between the elder daughters. Hiding his bitterness under metaphors and at times inversion-phrases, he hits the king in sore spots without reservation. He dares to say that his master is no more than a " fool " (I. iv. 147), " an O without a figure " (I. iv. 192), and " nothing." (I. iv. 193) When Lear is attacked by him, he cannot but exclaim, "A pestilent gall to me ! " (I. iv. 113) It seems too much to say that the Fool is " Lear's externalized conscience "[1] or an embodiment of Lear's" inner experience "[2]; rather in the first two acts he serves to make the audience objectively see the hero from outside. However, generally speaking, from Act III onward, when Lear's suffering reaches the utmost limits, he comes to be able to say, " I am a man / More sinn'd against than sinning." (III. ii. 59–60)

The crucial moment arrives near the end of Act I, Scene iv, when Lear, cut away from his former world, loses his own identity. At the beginning of the same scene Lear, in a high rage against Oswald's impertinence, asks hm, " Who am I, sir ? " (I. iv. 77) Oswald, who has been commanded by Goneril to act rudely to Lear, answers, " My lady's father." (81) Since Lear expected the answer, " You are King," Oswald's words provoke him exceedingly. This passage suggests that at this stage Lear cannot imagine at all that the question " Who am I ? " is, on a higher level, concerned with his real existence. He does not yet understand that such a problem as " What is man ? " exists. However,

[1] R. H. Goldsmith, *Wise Fools in Shakespeare*, Liverpool University Press, 1958, p. 67.

[2] M. Mack, " The Jacobean Shakespeare," *Jacobean Theatre*, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies, I, London, Edward Arnold, 1960, p. 25.

afterwards in the face of Goneril's revolt against him, he is forced to ask "Who am I?" in relation to the reality of his own self. The pattern of his existence shatters as is shown in the following speech:

> Does any here know me? This is not Lear.
> Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
> Are lethargied.—Ha! waking? 'Tis not so.—
> Who is it that can tell me who I am? (I. iv. 225–9)

To this the wise Fool justly answers, "Lear's shadow." (230) Lear continues to say, "I would learn that [who I am]." (231) Here begins his search for what he really is, his quest for the difference between appearance and reality. As the world-picture which he has so far firmly maintained is broken, he cannot identify others as well as himself. He asks Goneril, "Are you our daughter?" (217) and "Your name, fair gentlewoman?" (235) These questions exasperate her because she suspects that they have sprung from his spite and his sarcasm. It seems, however, that Lear asks the above questions not only to satirize her but also from a sincere desire to ascertain the real nature of his daughter. He finds that the daughter standing before him is not what he has thought her to be. In a stormy wilderness he must wander in search of reality, trying to answer the question, "Who am I?"

The universe is now thrown into chaos. In Lear's "little world of man" (III. i. 10), there exists a conflict between self-pity and self-accusation, between an earnest desire for revenge upon his two daughters and an awareness of his own responsibility. As the microcosm of Lear is in a stormy state, so is the macrocosm which always reflects the microcosm. Deprived of the very necessities of life, he reaches the lowest state of existence. Afterwards remembering this night, the mad Lear says,

> When the rain
> came to wet me once, and the wind to make
> me chatter; when the thunder would not
> peace at my bidding; there I found 'em,
> there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they are not
> men o' their words. They told me I was
> everything; 'tis a lie—I am not ague-proof. (IV. vi. 99–105)

He learns that the sweet words of the elder daughters and courtiers which he had believed true, are only shadows without substance and that he is in reality " not everything," but only " a poor, infirm, weak and despis'd old man." (III. ii. 20) As the experience on the heath leads him to recognize the difference between appearance and reality, he cries out:

> Tremble, thou wretch,
> That hast within thee undivulged crimes
> Unwhipp'd of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand;
> Thou perjur'd, and thou simular man of virtue
> That art incestuous; caitiff, to pieces shake,
> That under covert and convenient seeming
> Hast practis'd on man's life. Close pent-up guilts,
> Rive your concealing continents, and cry
> These dreadful summoners grace. (III. ii. 51–9)

These lines show on the one hand his claim for the gods' justice in punishing crimes; at the same time they indicate that he has come to discern the conflict between the truth and the seeming truth.

Moreover, his extreme suffering brings about a new phase in Lear's inner development. He is transformed so far as to have sympathy for others. The first sign of this appears in the following words of Lear to the Fool, who is quite enfeebled by his wanderings in the storm:

> Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
> I am cold myself. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
> That's sorry yet for thee. (III. ii. 68–73)

He even takes the trouble, when going into a hovel for the Fool's sake, to let the Fool " go first." (III. iv. 26) The famous prayer on the heath reveals this enlargement of his vision:

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,

For the first time in his life he becomes aware of his kinship with all men, even with the lowest of distressed humanity. Though Lear's prayer is sometimes interpreted as an expression of " Christian charity,"[1] it seems to me to manifest rather a secular vision of love and of the community of mankind. It is true that brotherly love forms an essential part of Christianity, but it is better and more natural to take Lear's prayer as an awakening to a humanistic fellow-feeling.

Lear's encounter with Tom, the Bedlam beggar, has a crucial significance in his quest for identity. This beggar is none other than Edgar, who, in order to escape from Gloucester's pursuit, has reduced himself to " the basest and most poorest shape / That ever penury in contempt of man / Brought near to beast." (II. iii. 7–9) Shakespeare makes the theme of the truth and seeming truth more complicated by showing that it is not Edgar, but ironically Edgar's pretense that Lear takes for an embodiment of reality.[2] This naked beggar, obsessed with devils and the lower animals, makes Gloucester " think a man a worm." (IV. i. 32) For Lear he forms an image of the real nature of man: " the thing itself " and " unaccommodated man." The following speech, which Lear makes when he sees the wretched state of the beggar, marks a turning point in his psychic life:

> Why, thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncover'd body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here. (III. iv. 100–8)

Lear's gesture of tearing off clothes symbolically suggests his desire to identify himself with the naked beggar, an emblem of the bare truth. He finds that a human being is essentially no more than a sort of animal and that he is distinguished from a beast merely by his clothes. He comes to think man a wretched and tainted creature, without any dignity,

[1] Danby, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

[2] William Empson, " Fool in Lear," *The Structure of Complex Words*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1951, p. 138.

just like the Bedlam beggar. It is a bitter discovery of the reality of man, one which has some resemblance to Montaigne's view. Stripped of his kingly power and then of the very necessities for life, Lear thus acquires an insight into the real nature of the daughters, himself, and mankind.

Lear is allowed to reach reality at the cost of everything indispensable for human existence. As his suffering is beyond man's endurance, he even loses his reason in spite of his earnest wish, " O, let me not be mad." (I. v. 42) The state of the insane Lear is justly commented on by Edgar: " O, matter and impertinency mix'd! / Reason in madness! " (IV. vi. 175–6) It is true that sometimes his words are nonsensical, but paradoxically enough it is the insane Lear who is finally able to distinguish the truth from the seeming truth.[1] For instance, if we compare the mock trial which he presides over in Act III, Scene vi with the love test of the first scene, we find that the " mad " Lear is much more sensible than the " sane " Lear in judging his daughters. Lear is thus permitted to find his own identity at the cost of sanity. It stands to reason that the Fool disappears at the end of III. vi., when Lear's madness grows strong. The Fool is no longer dramatically necessary, for Lear is now gradually acquiring self-knowledge.

The first occasion when Lear appears after the storm scenes is IV. vi., where he encounters the blind Gloucester near Dover. Here is presented an appalling picture of man in an extremity of suffering. It is this scene that shows the climax of Lear's pessimism in a most unforgettable way. Therefore, it is no wonder that sometimes IV. vi. is thought to be the chief scene of *King Lear*. Lear comments with desperate irony on the evil inherent in humanity and on the injustice widespread in society. It is remarkable that throughout this scene Lear is haunted by a disgust for sex. Lear's speech about the depravity of women indicates how his imagination is tainted with a loathing for sex:

> Down from the waist they are centaurs,
> Though women all above;
> But to the girdle do the gods inherit,

[1] R. B. Heilman, *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in " King Lear,"* Louisiana State University Press, 1948, pp. 173–224. He especially emphasizes the paradoxicality.

Beneath is all the fiends':
There's hell, there's darkness, there is the
sulphurous pit—
Burning, scalding, stench, consumption.
Fie, fie, fie! pah, pah!
Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary,
to sweeten my imagination. There's money
for thee. (IV. vi. 124–31)

The horror for sex results from a disillusionment with mankind and is one of the characteristics of the so-called tragic period of Shakespeare. For example, Lear's disgust for sex echoes Hamlet's words to Ophelia:

Get thee to a nunnery. Why
wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? (III. i. 121–2)

Lear becomes aware that he is " a breeder of sinners," the father of his unnatural daughters. Here is a full realization of what he indicated before to Goneril:

But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter;
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine; thou art a boil,
A plague—sore, or embossed carbuncle
In my corrupted blood. (II. iv. 220–4)

or of what he admitted in the storm:

Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters. (III. iv. 73–4)

Thus he discovers evil existing not only in Goneril and Regan but also in himself and all humanity.

Lear's consciousness of the corruption of all mankind brings about a mistrust of human justice. He thinks that if only the pretense of those who judge others is stripped off, they will be the same as criminals; " change places and, handy-dandy, which is / the justice, which is the thief?" (IV. vi. 54–5) He says, " None does offend, none—I say none " (168) because he knows that all are false. " Robes and furr'd gowns hide all " (165), but " Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear." (164)

It is *King Lear* that reveals the beastly reality of humanity on the largest

scale of all Shakespearean tragedies. In *Othello* and *Macbeth* evil does not taint *all* mankind. Those plays are concerned with the degradation of the protagonists, not of all humanity. However desperate the fall of the heroes may be, there is no shattering of the dignity of all mankind. Speaking of the depravity of man, *Hamlet* may be remembered, but there is a definite difference between *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. The disillusioned Hamlet thinks man utterly corrupt. It is notable, however, that he is aware of the evil reality of others, especially Claudius and Gertrude, but not of himself. Curiously enough Hamlet does not deeply consider what he himself did to Polonius and Ophelia. Unlike Lear he cannot say, "None does offend." He is a revenger who seeks to punish Claudius. The idea of the futility of human justice is found only in *King Lear* of all Shakespearean tragedies.[1]

Lear's quest for identity now approaches its end. Through suffering he acquires an insight into reality. If the play had ended at IV. vi., where his view of man reaches its lowest point, it would have been strikingly parallel to *Timon of Athens*. Just like Lear, Timon at first cannot distinguish the truth from the seeming truth. In both plays, the suffering caused by the ingratitude of others leads the hero to discover the evil reality of human nature beneath the appearance of good. However, there is a noticeable difference between these two plays. Timon rejects the comfort offered by a faithful steward (IV. iii. 475–536) and dies making a tirade on the corruption of man. As the play shows only railing, no particularly tragic emotion is evoked. Apemantus, a bitter satirist, justly criticizes Timon: "The middle of humanity thou never knewest, / but the extremity of both ends." (IV. iii. 299–300) Lear is not, however, Timon, a "Misanthropos." (IV. iii. 52)

Until IV. vi. the movement of *King Lear* is all downward. However, there can be found a counter-movement upward in IV. vii., though it is only a momentary flash which is soon put out. Though his consciousness of guilt—"sovereign shame," "burning shame" (IV. iii. 42, 46)—has so far forbidden him to meet with Cordelia, Lear's reunion with her at last takes place in IV. vii. There is a difference of opinion

[1] C. J. Sisson, *Shakespeare's Tragic Justice*, London, Methuen, 1962, p. 90.

about the import of Cordelia. Recently it is rather fashionable to take her allegorically as a Christ-like figure. This view is based on an ecclesiastic interpretation of such words as "holy water," "heavenly eyes" (IV. iii. 30), "redeems" (IV. vi. 208), and "a soul in bliss" (IV. vii. 46) which are used in describing her.[1] To etherealize her too much by giving her a Christian allegorical interpretation seems to me to distort Shakespeare's intention. She is primarily presented not so much as a Christian symbol as an embodiment of filial affection. In opposition to the Christian allegorical interpretation of Cordelia, some emphasize that she is *humanly* moving.[2] However, she is presented as too extremely good and abstract to remain merely a common woman of flesh and blood. Shakespeare's wish seems to be to represent her as an embodiment of human goodness. As Goneril and Regan are the incarnation of unnaturalness, so Cordelia is the incarnation of filial duty.

Lear's reunion with Cordelia has a crucial importance for his inner development. His transformation is made obvious. Even his manner of speaking changes. He no longer speaks in a bombastic tone; his speeches in this scene mostly consist of simple and monosyllabic words. Now he is given full self-knowledge. Tormented with repentance, he says,

> . . . I am bound
> Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears

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[1] S. L. Bethell first pointed out that images of Christianity are used for her description. See *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition*, London, Staples Press, 1944, pp. 59–60. This argument was developed by J. F. Danby and G. I. Duthie. Duthie, "Introduction," *King Lear*, Cambridge University Press, 1962, pp. xx–xxv. Danby, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

Danby asserts that Cordelia is anagogically "the redemptive principle itself" and even claims, in my view unconvincingly, that when:

"The Gentleman in Act IV, vi, says of Lear:

> Thou hast one daughter
> Who redeems nature from the general curse
> Which twain have brought her to.

the twain referred to are not Goneril and Regan. Quite obviously Shakespeare is referring here to Adam and Eve."

[2] G. Bush, *Shakespeare and the Natural Condition*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1956, p. 120. Sewell, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

Do scald like molten lead. (IV. vii. 46–8)

When he sees Cordelia kneeling before him, he dares to kneel himself[1] and ask forgiveness of her: "Pray you now, forget and forgive; I am old and foolish." (IV. vii. 85) To his own question, "Who am I?", which he asked in I. iv., he humbly answers: "I am a very foolish fond old man." (60) Lear's long quest for identity has been completed. Stripped of all layers of appearance, he reaches a vision of the naked reality of himself—"a poor, bare, forked / animal." (III. iv. 106–7) Such self-knowledge is the goal of the search for the difference between appearance and reality.

However, the play does not end here, and the problem raised by it is still unsettled. Today it is somewhat popular to interpret *King Lear* as a play of affirmation or as an attainment of salvation simply because the hero acquires self-knowledge near the end. For instance, Duthie writes:

> At the beginning of Shakespeare's play, Lear is foolish. At the end, he is a man who has learned wisdom. And it is an appalling intensity of suffering that has taught him this wisdom. This is a play about education. It is not essentially different to say that it is also a play about conversion, spiritual regeneration, the attainment of salvation.[2]

As Lear through suffering develops so far as to awake to reality, we can say with Duthie that he "has learned wisdom." However, it seems too hasty for him to conclude that *King Lear* is therefore a play about "spiritual regeneration" or "the attainment of salvation" only because the protagonist acquires an insight into the truth. It must be noted that the fact that Lear achieves self-knowledge does not redirect the action of the play. The situation reverses itself immediately after IV. vii. If the play ended with the reunion of Lear and Cordelia, as *King Leir* did, it would become a sort of romance such as *Cymbeline* and Duthie's words would not be out of place. However, *King Lear* is not a divine comedy

[1] Compare this passage with his ironic kneeling before Regan at II. iv. 152.
The kneeling of parents to children was quite an extraordinary event. Cf. Volumnia's kneeling to Coriolanus.

[2] Duthie, *op. cit.*, p. xx.

which ends with a happy reconciliation between father and child. Lear's union with Cordelia is short-lived. Lear has a possibility of regeneration only when he is able to recognize that the world contains not only Goneril and Regan but also Cordelia, not only evil but also good. When he is united with her, he can even embrace the misfortune of being taken prisoner with serenity, as is shown in the following beautiful lines:

> No, no no, no! Come, let's away to prison.
> We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage;
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too—
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out—
> And take upon's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out
> In a wall'd prison packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by th' moon. (V. iii. 8–19)

He believes that they will never part:

> He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven
> And fire us hence like foxes. (V. iii. 22–3)

In spite of this firm belief, however, Cordelia is not allowed to live in the universe of *King Lear*. Now, in order to examine the essence of the tragedy, we need turn our attention from Lear's inner change to the *Lear* world into which the hero and all the other characters are thrown.

Chapter II The Universe of *King Lear*

It is notable that, apart from Lear and Gloucester, all the dramatic persons are clearly divided into two parties, very good and bad. The former consists of Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, the Fool, and Albany; the latter, of Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, Edmund and Oswald. Bradley claims, " There is in the world of *King Lear* the same abundance of extreme good as of extreme evil," and opposes Samuel Johnson's view that " it seems odd to describe *King Lear* as a ' play in which the wicked

prosper.' "[1] Though it may be too much to say that "the wicked prosper" since they prove to be self-destructive in the end, yet it must be recognized at the same time that the good characters remain quite ineffective agents for the mastering of evil. In the *Lear* universe, where the seeming truth is dominant over the real truth, the just perish like the unjust. Edmund, Goneril, and Regan are both agents and products of the disorder in the world. Their wickedness is so extreme that they look like the embodiment of evil. As Cordelia is an incarnation of goodness, so are Goneril and Regan incarnations of evil. The cruelty of the unnatural daughters is fittingly described in animal images, of tigers, wolves, serpents, vultures and so on. When the mild Albany accuses his wife, Goneril, of ingratitude to Lear, he comments thus on man's descent into animality:

> If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
> It will come
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
> Like monsters of the deep. (IV. ii. 46–50)

The evil characters exemplify the final two lines. The abundance of animal imagery, which is too well known to be detailed here, suggests the predominance of evil in the *Lear* universe. The cold sanity of Goneril and Regan is well depicted in their realistic and unimaginative prose conversation at the end of I. i. The violent conflict between them and Lear in I. iv. and II. iv. shows their inhuman rationalism. Their lust for Edmund deprives them of reason and makes them slaves of passion. Here Shakespeare emphasizes the moral madness inherent in their nature by setting up a terrible situation in which the married sisters strive against each other for Edmund. Edmund, a bastard, is also a rationalist who may rightly be called a politic Machiavelli, an emancipated man, or a Renaissance scientist. The action of the play is moved by Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, while the good characters are at their mercy. Their fortune mounts to the summit in Act III, where Lear goes mad in his wanderings and Gloucester is cruelly blinded. The

[1] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, London, Macmillan, 1956, p. 304.

world of " I am I " turns out to be self-destructive only at the end.

On the other hand, the good characters must suffer to the utmost limit. Shakespeare uses the technique of expansion and intensification to increase the suffering in the world of *King Lear*. First he treats the tragedy of the hero as a universal allegory rather than as a case history, so the play is quite unlike *Othello*. Lear's experience is meant to signify more than something merely personal; it is meant to be an archetype of the universal. For example, his tormented figure in the wilderness represents all mankind in torture. Moreover, the tragedy of Lear is expanded by the correspondence of the cosmos, the state, and the individual, an idea which Shakespeare derived from contemporary concepts of the world.[1] As the protagonist is in agony, so are the cosmos and the state of Britain, " this scattered kingdom." (III. i. 31) The dramatist thus presents a terrible picture of both the microcosm and macrocosm in disorder and chaos. The obscurity of the setting—ancient Britain—is at times criticized as an aesthetic blemish, but in truth it serves to increase universality. More than in any other play, the personal history of the hero is transformed into mighty universal events.

Secondly, Shakespeare makes use of the sub-plot to intensify the suffering in the *Lear* universe. It is only *King Lear* of the Shakespearean tragedies that has a fully developed sub-plot. Sometimes in Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas, the sub-plot is a product of the dramatist's double vision which serves to make an ironical criticism on or to contrast with the main action, as in *The Changeling*.[2] However, in *King Lear* it seems that the Gloucester story does not furnish a critical comment on the main plot but, rather, reinforces the Lear story by repeating a similar theme. Here Shakespeare depends on the artistic law that two parallel examples are more credible than one. The sub-plot was derived in rough outline from the episode of the Paphlagonian King of Sidney's *Arcadia*. (Lib. 2, Chapter 10) Gloucester is an average sensual man, much simpler and coarser than Lear. His experience is a repetition of Lear's on a lower

[1]Spencer, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

[2] M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*, Cambridge University Press, 1960, paperback edition, p. 46.

level; Gloucester's experience is much more physically brutal. Just like Lear, Gloucester is at the beginning unable to distinguish between appearance and reality. He is spiritually too blind to judge Edmund and Edgar rightly. It is quite paradoxical that he comes to know Edgar's innocence just when his eyes are cruelly gouged out. (III. vii. 90–1) As Lear reaches reality at the cost of his sanity, so Gloucester acquires sight in blindness—" I stumbled when I saw." (IV. i. 20) Hovering between despair and resignation, he is led to seek for his own identity. As he becomes more conscious than before of the reality of himself and man, he even feels sympathy for the misfortune of others. He says to Edgar in the disguise of a beggar the following words, which are parallel with Lear's prayer on the heath:

> Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues
> Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched
> Makes thee the happier. Heavens, deal so still!
> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man
> That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
> Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly;
> So distribution should undo excess,
> And each man have enough. (IV. i. 65–72)

Thus the Gloucester story, echoing the fundamental significance of the main plot, contributes to the creation of a stage where all humanity is in torment.

The third characteristic of the technique of *King Lear* is, as L. C. Knights points out, " a maximum imaginative realization and a minimum regard for conventions of naturalism."[1] It is beyond dispute that naturalism is not a useful criterion for judging any Elizabethan dramas including those of Shakespeare. Especially in *King Lear*, however, is this anti-naturalistic tendency conspicuous; many unpsychological treatments of characters and inconsistencies of plot are to be found.[2] For instance, why does Edmund delay in attempting to save Lear and Cordelia?[3] Or, why do Edgar and Kent unnecessarily continue their dis-

[1] L. C. Knights, *Some Shakespearean Themes*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1959, p. 92.

[2] Cf. Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp. 257–8, where he illustrates the inconsistencies of the plot.

[3] I will examine this below on p. 29.

guise? On the naturalistic plane, there is no reason why the revelations of Edgar and Kent cannot be made earlier. It seems that Shakespeare intends to stress that the beneficence of Edgar and Kent is not permitted to mitigate the evil emanating from Edmund, Goneril, and Regan.[1] Shakespeare's wish is probably to make Lear and Gloucester suffer to the utmost. In the *Lear* universe the good are thus not allowed to palliate the suffering of Lear and Gloucester. Act III Scene iv is a case in point. On the stormy heath Lear wanders, followed merely by the Fool, Edgar disguised as a naked beggar, and Kent as Caius. Unable to obey the harsh command of Goneril and Regan to shut out the old king, Gloucester appears to offer him help. Gloucester, who cannot recognize Kent and his son Edgar right in front of him, makes the following speech to none other than Kent:

> His [Lear's] daughters seek his death. Ah, that good Kent!—
> He said it would be thus—poor, banish'd man!
> Thou sayest the King grows mad; I'll tell thee, friend,
> I am almost mad myself. I had a son,
> Now outlaw'd from my blood; he sought my life
> But lately, very late. I lov'd him, friend—
> No father his son dearer. True to tell thee,
> The grief hath craz'd my wits. What a night's this! (III. iv. 159–66)

Though Kent has no sufficient reason here to persist in his disguise, he keeps silent; Edgar, hearing his father's accusations against him, can only say, "Tom's a cold." (173) This ironical situation seems to be designed to exhibit the extreme suffering of Lear and Gloucester. It is reasonable for Edgar not to disclose himself in this scene since Gloucester still mistakenly regards him as guilty. However, from IV. i. onward when he leads the blind father to the Dover cliff, there is no sufficient motivation for him to continue his self-imposed disguise. Gloucester, who is unaware of Edgar's presence, says,

> O dear son Edgar,
> The food of thy abused father's wrath!
> Might I but live to see in my touch,

[1]D. G. James, *The Dream of Learning*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1951, pp. 106–15.

Edgar says aside: " I cannot daub it further " (53), "And yet I must." (55) We are not told why he must do so in order to save his father " from despair." (V. iii. 191) He reveals himself to Gloucester only near Gloucester's death. From the standpoint of common sense, his conduct is a " fault " (V. iii. 192), as he himself afterwards comments. Similarly, Kent has no ground to continue his disguise after Act III. Although he excuses himself by saying that " Some dear cause / Will in concealment wrap me up awhile " (IV. iii. 51–2), the " dear cause " is never explained. It is somewhat exceptional in Shakespeare that loyalty of a servant remains unrecognized by the master to the end. In spite of Kent's urgent words, however, Lear cannot identify Kent with the Caius who shared his sufferings in the wanderings. (V. iii. 282–94) Thus in the world of *King Lear* goodness is helpless and must hide. Such a characteristic of the plot cannot be criticized from the point of view of naturalism. It is a device which Shakespeare used to present the sufferings of mankind on a larger scale than in any other play.

It is the denouement that displays the real nature of the *Lear* universe by marking the culmination of the suffering. The catastrophe needs to be examined closely since its peculiarities distinguish the play from other Shakespearean tragedies. It is not easy to conclude to what extent acts of moral choice bring about the catastrophe, or, on the contrary, to what degree chance or fate operates to induce the calamities. First, let me quote a passage from Bradley's critique on *King Lear* so that the attempt to answer these questions may be made easier:

> The position of the hero in this tragedy is in one important respect peculiar. The reader of Hamlet, Othello, or Macbeth, is in no danger of forgetting, when the catastrophe is reached, the part played by the hero in bringing it on. His fatal weakness, error, wrong-doing, continues almost to the end. It is otherwise with *King Lear*. When the conclusion arrives, the old King has for a long while been passive. We have long regarded him not only as " a man more sinned against than sinning," but almost wholly as a sufferer, hardly at all as an agent.[1]

Bradley's view of tragedy is fundamentally a Hegelian one, which em-

[1] Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

phasizes the causal sequence of character, deed, and catastrophe: " the calamities and catastrophe follow inevitably from the deeds of men, and . . . the main source of these deeds is character."[1] Such a concept of tragedy involves a danger of reducing a tragedy to a moral example, as in *A Mirror for Magistrates*. Shakespeare's tragic world is not, admittedly, a world of perfect logic or of retributive justice in which character, action, and catastrophe are strictly connected. Nevertheless, in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, the hero's contribution to the action of the drama is, as Bradley says, evident. Above all, in *Othello* and *Macbeth* the part played by the hero in inducing the catastrophe is noticeable. It may well be said that the calamities of Othello and Macbeth result mainly from their incapability of distinguishing appearance from reality.[2] Of course, it must be recognized also that they are essentially victims of the tragic irony of human blindness—*peripeteia* in the true sense of Aristotle: namely, they are victims of the " tragic effect of human effort producing exactly the opposite result to its intention."[3] Sometimes the hero commits an error not because of a defect in him but rather because of a good quality, as is shown in Othello's openness, noble but vulnerable. Therefore, it is only natural that the audience is involved in the hero's tragedy and that his destruction abundantly evokes pity and fear.

It is well-known that Aristotle divided tragedies into two classes: " simple " and " complex," or in other words, " tragedies of simple circumstances " and " tragedies of errors." If we apply such a classification to Shakespearean tragedies—though there is admittedly danger of oversimplification, we may generally say that *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy of simple circumstances, while *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth* represent Aristotle's ideal form of " complex " tragedy, in which the destruction of the hero is caused by some false step taken by him in blindness. To which category, then, does *King Lear* belong? It is

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[2] Cf. above, pp. 4–5.

[3] F. L. Lucas, *Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1961, p. 113. As Lucas points out, to interpret Aristotle's theory of " hamartia " too morally seems a distortion.

palpable that the play is not a simple tragedy of circumstances like *Romeo and Juliet*. In *King Lear* there is *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*, as I established in Chapter I. However, the drama does not remain a tragedy of errors but is enlarged into a cosmic tragedy. The catastrophe of *King Lear* is caused not so much by Lear's original mistake of I. i. as by an ironical turn of events. Lear's uttermost tragedy is that he is thrown into the hostile *Lear* universe. Although Bradley stresses Lear's error in the first scene, saying that "it is essential that Lear's contribution to the action of the drama should be remembered,"[1] his remark fails to persuade us. It is true that at the very beginning Lear commits an error and that afterwards the process of his awakening to his own error is depicted. On the whole, however, from Act III onward he should be taken as a sufferer rather than as an agent.[2] Bradley's theory of the strict connection between act and consequence is based on the belief that the ultimate power that rules any Shakespearean tragic world is "a moral order" or "moral system"[3] which aims at perfect goodness. Once a causal sequence of act and consequence is negated, however, the above supposition that the tragic world is controlled by a moral order akin to goodness also becomes doubtful. In reality, more than any other Shakespearean tragedy, *King Lear* indicates that Bradleyite optimism is not true to the tragic world and that the ultimate power which rules the tragic world is not "a moral system."

It is Cordelia's death that most clearly shows the frightful peculiarity of the *Lear* universe. Why does Cordelia die? and by violence?—this question has puzzled many critics. Simply because she is so good, the effect produced by her death is the more terrible. Sometimes her death has been even censured as an aesthetic blot because of its inexplicability. Samuel Johnson, for instance, said:

> Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles. . . . I was many years ago so shocked by Cor-

[1] Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

[2] Cf. Chapter I, pp. 10–11.

[3] Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 33, 35.

delia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.[1]

He frankly admits that he prefers Tate's happy ending, which in modern eyes completely mutilates the essence of Shakespeare's version. Tate's notorious version is a sentimental story telling " That Truth and Vertue shall at last succeed."[2] From the end of the 17th century, his version was welcomed for about a hundred and fifty years because the moral optimism of those days could not bear Shakespeare's ending, which has nothing to do with poetic justice. Even in this century, Bradley, bewildered by Cordelia's death, says that his feelings—his dramatic sense —call for a happy ending.[3]

As Dr. Johnson writes, it is notable that the original story tells of the victory and restoration of Lear. The story was first written by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century, and in the Tudor period there could be found not a few works which referred to the life of Lear. It is generally agreed that the sources of the main-plot of *King Lear* are an anonymous play, *The Chronicle History of King Leir*, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Spenser's *The Faery Queene* (Second Booke, Canto X, 27–32), and *A Mirror for Magistrates*.[4] *King Leir* is a tragi-comedy which ends with Leir's restoration. The others also tell of Leir's restoration, his happy later years as a British King, and his death, followed by the reign of Cordelia, her defeat and suicide. The only exception that tells of Cordelia's death before Leir's is the ballad, " King Leir and his Three Daughters," probably written immediately after Shakespeare's *King Lear*.[5] Why did Shakespeare change Cordelia's suicide into a violent death by hanging? Why is Shakespeare's Lear defeated unlike the original story? A few assert that Lear must lose the battle because of patriotic necessity, that

[1] W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., ed., *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, London, Macgibbon and Kee, 1960, pp. 97–8.

[2] H. H. Furness, ed., *King Lear*, The Variorum Shakespeare, London, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1880, p. 477.

[3] Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

[4] Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, London, Methuen, 1957, pp. 142–3.

[5] B. H. C. De Mendonca, " The Influence of *Gorboduc* on *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Survey* 13, Cambridge University Press, 1960, p. 41.

is, England should conquer France.[1] However, this " reason " is not helpful. Still less credible is the explanation that such a tragic ending is an inevitable result of Lear's error at the beginning or of Cordelia's original obstinacy.[2] One possible explanation may be that Cordelia's death originates from the simple artistic necessity to lead up naturally to the tragic death of Lear. This, however, is not enough to explain the capriciousness of the denouement which is so characteristic of *King Lear*. It seems to me that Cordelia's death is not only a useful means to make an effective ending but also that it is deeply meaningful. The universe of *King Lear* itself requires her peculiar death. Cordelia's death is, so to speak, a fact of Shakespeare's tragic vision.

Though Cordelia is an innocent victim like Ophelia and Desdemona, she differs from them in two points. First, arbitrariness is intentionally emphasized in Cordelia's death. As I pointed out above,[3] no sufficiently clear reason is supplied for the delay in Edmund's telling the others of the instructions he has given to kill Lear and Cordelia. When Edmund hears about his father's last moment from Edgar, he says,

> This speech of yours hath mov'd me,
> And shall perchance do good; but speak you on;
> You look as you had something more to say. (V. iii. 199–201)

Though he here seems to think of saving Lear and Cordelia, he delays confessing his plot until l. 240 for no clear reason. Besides, the following famous juxtaposition enhances the irony:

> Alb. The gods defend her!
> Enter Lear, with Cordelia dead in his arms; (V. iii. 255–6)

Shakespeare's wish seems to impress upon us the reversal of events by giving a sudden blow to the expectation of saving Cordelia which he

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[1] Cf. Irving Ribner, " Shakespeare and Legendary History: *Lear* and *Cymbeline*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. VII, pp. 47–52, New York, The Shakespeare Association of America, Inc., 1956. Ribner affirms that Shakespeare changed the outline of sources for a political purpose as well as for a tragic purpose.

[2] E.g. G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 273; J. Lawlor, *The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1960, p. 170.

[3] Cf. Chapter II, p. 23.

has excited. In contrast with this, the death of Desdemona, though it is terrible enough, is a natural result of Othello's descent to Iago's world. Pathetic as Ophelia's end is, Gertrude's poetic description crowns her death (IV. vii. 165–82); there is no ironic turn of events.

The second characteristic of Cordelia's death is that its contingency gives rise to the question of theodicy in the most urgent way. Are the gods just? Why do the gods permit the wholly innocent to suffer? Lear asks the crucial question to which no answer is given in the play:

> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
> And thou no breath at all? (V. iii. 306–7)

Lear's question is especially effective because just before this speech Albany has declared his belief in retributive justice:

> All friends shall taste
> The wages of their virtue, and all foes
> The cup of their deservings. (V. iii. 302–4)

Lear's succeeding question illustrates that Albany's optimistic words are not true in the universe of *King Lear*.

Cordelia's death hastens Lear's final dissolution. As to Lear's death there are two different views. The one is to find a mitigation of pain in his death; the other is to regard his death as the culmination of an ordeal of torment. The former opinion is mainly based on two lines of reasoning. First, it emphasizes that the ultimate moral of *King Lear* is to show the futility of the power and prosperity of this world.[1] This is naturally followed by the view that Lear's death is a " fair dismissal "[2] from this worthless life. It may indeed be true that death is the only relief for those who live in the *Lear* universe, " the rack of this tough world." (V. iii. 314) However, if such a contempt of the world is pursued further and too other-worldly a view of life is permitted to dominate, the death of Cordelia and Lear is reduced to a mere epilogue and tragedy ceases to exist. Generally speaking, it is indispensable for tragedy that suffering and death matter greatly and that life and happiness

[1] E.g. Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp. 272–3.

[2] Charles Lamb, quoted in the New Variorum *King Lear*, p. 421.

are not renounced as entirely worthless. The fact that the Middle Ages were not rich soil for cultivating tragedy suggests that the tragic reading of life is fundamentally not so much Judaic as Hellenic.[1]

Secondly, those who seek mitigation of pain in Lear's death affirm that he dies from a joy induced by the belief that Cordelia is yet alive. The last moments of Lear need to be examined closely because whether or not the gods' way is justified in the play depends, to some extent, on what happens then.[2] The following lines are Lear's final speech:

> And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never.
> Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips.
> Look there, look there! (He dies.) (V. iii. 305–11)

The opinion that Lear's death is a transfiguration of joy was first set forth by Bradley and has become current today.[3] Bradley maintains that Lear dies from " an unbearable joy," saying,

> . . . though he is killed by an agony of pain, the agony in which he actually dies is one not of pain but of ecstasy. Suddenly, with a cry represented in the oldest text by a four-times repeated " O," he exclaims:
>
> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
> Look there, look there!
>
> These are the last words of Lear. He is sure, at last, that she lives. . . .[4]

The view that he dies in ecstasy is derived from the last two lines of Lear's final speech. It is remarkable that the crucial two lines are found only in the Folio version and are omitted from both the so-called Pied Bull Quarto published in 1608 and the second Quarto of 1619, which

[1] George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, London, Faber and Faber, 1961, p. 4.

[2] Concerning the interpretation of the catastrophe, two short essays, " The Catharsis of *King Lear* " by J. Stampfer and " Lear's Last Speech " by J. K. Walton, included in *Shakespeare Survey* 13 are helpful.

[3] E.g. Granville-Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 300; Kenneth Muir, " Introduction," Arden *King Lear*, p. lix; H. S. Wilson, *On the Design of Shakespearean Tragedy*, Toronto University Press, 1957, p. 204.

[4] Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

was probably printed from the first Quarto. According to the Quarto reading, Lear dies in a painful agony expressing dying groans in the four times iterated " O." The Quarto of *King Lear* has always been recognized as unsatisfactory and much less authoritative than the Folio text. Whether the Quarto was printed from foul papers or whether it is a reported text is still unresolved and needs further investigation.[1] Duthie supposes that the Quarto's omission of the last two lines of Lear's speech now in question is due to a forgetful reporter.[2] In contrast, C. J. Sisson suggests that Shakespeare " deliberately " added these two lines between 1608 and 1623 " with a far deeper intention."[3] Which is more credible cannot be easily decided, since to what extent the Quarto is authoritative is an open question. If the Quarto version approximates the stage presentation of Lear's death, for instance, Bradley's view that he dies from ecstasy becomes unconvincing. However, as the problem of text is unsettled, let us suppose, as is commonly done, that Shakespeare made Lear utter the two crucial lines of the Folio.

The final two lines suggest that Lear believes Cordelia to be alive. However, this fact does not necessarily support the view that Lear's death is a mitigation of pain. After he appears on the stage with Cordelia's corpse, his mind wavers between sanity and illusion. Before the last moment he twice thinks that she is alive—" This feather stirs ; she lives " (V. iii. 255); " Ha ! / What is't thou say'st ? " (271–2) The conversation between Lear and Kent also stresses that the old king is

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[1] Madeleine Doran says that the Quarto was printed from Shakespeare's foul papers. (" Elements in the Composition of *King Lear*," *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 30, January, 1933, No. I, pp. 34–58, The University of North Carolina Press.)

Alice Walker sets forth the idea that the Quarto is an abnormally careless transcript of foul papers contaminated by recollections of performance. (*Textual Problems of the First Folio*, Cambridge University Press, 1953, pp. 37–67.)

On the other hand, E. K. Chambers (*William Shakespeare*, Vol. I, p. 465), G. I. Duthie (*Shakespeare's " King Lear " : A Critical Edition*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1949, pp. 19–72) and W. W. Greg (*The Shakespeare First Folio*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955, pp. 375–88) support the thesis that the Quarto is a reported text.

[2] Duthie, " *King Lear* " : *A Critical Edition*, pp. 43–4.

[3] Sisson, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

not of sound mind. He himself admits: " Mine eyes are not o' th' best." (279) Albany justly comments: " He knows not what he says." (293) It seems too much to say that Lear dies from " an unbearable joy "; rather it is more suitable to think that he dies in a false illusion. For the audience, too, the discovery that he is deceived is distressing enough. The picture of his death is like " the promis'd end " (263) and " image of that horror " (264) in the words of Kent and Edgar. Lear's death is the culmination of an ordeal of torment rather than a mitigation of pain.

Besides, the darkness of the catastrophe is enhanced by the fact that there is to be found neither affirmation of the succeeding order nor glorification of the hero's death by anyone present on the stage. In this point *King Lear* is different from other Shakespearean tragedies. On the whole, when a Shakespearean tragic hero faces death, he announces who he is and embraces what is most meaningful in his life. What is most important for the dying Hamlet, for instance, is to secure honour, so he entreats Horatio to tell his story to other people. (V. ii. 341) Horatio gives a benediction over his death: " Good night sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." (V. ii. 351–2) Shakespeare even permits Fortinbras to appear at the denouement to renew the order at the cost of a catastrophic effect. Similarly, when Othello faces death, he renders the best estimate of himself in the famous speech beginning " Soft you; a word or two before you go . . . " (V. ii. 34–59), for which he is even criticized by T. S. Eliot for " cheering himself up " or " self-dramatization."[1] Though Macbeth is not allowed to make a death speech of exculpation, a renewal of order is seen on the level of the body politic. In contrast with these tragedies, however, there appears no promise of a renewed life and order in *King Lear*. What the survivors speak is remarkably gloomy. Albany says,

> Our present business
> Is general woe. (To Kent and Edgar) Friends of my soul, you twain

[1] T. S. Eliot, " Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," *Shakespeare Criticism* 1919–1935, The World's Classics, edited by A. Ridler, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 213–4.

Rule in this realm and the gor'd state sustain. (V. iii. 318–20)

It is a modest desire to " sustain " " the gor'd state." Next Kent proclaims an anticipated death:

I have a journey, sir, shortly to go.
My master calls me; I must not say no. (321–2)

Edgar makes the last speech of the play in a gloomy tone:

The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
Shall never see so much nor live so long. (323–6)

The second line especially reveals the essence of *King Lear*—a refusal to conceal what things really are, however sombre they may be.

Such a dismal tone and such a capricious turn of events, bringing about the violent death of Cordelia and Lear, distinguish *King Lear* from other Shakespearean tragedies. More than any other play, *King Lear* raises problems concerning fate and the gods' justice. Lear says: " I am / The natural fool of fortune." (IV. vi. 191–2) In the medieval period it was generally thought that fickle Fortune was permitted by God to destroy the good as well as the evil in order to reveal the futility of this world and to heighten " Contemptus Mundi." Thus, though Fortune looks irrational to man, it has been designed by God so that man's aspiration for the future life may be intensified.[1] However, *King Lear* was, of course, no longer a product of such a medieval soil. It raises a profound question about theodicy. Lear asks the following crucial questions, which are left unanswered:

Is there any cause in nature that make
these hard hearts?
(III. vi. 76–7) . . . (concerning the unnaturalness of Goneril and Regan)

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all?
(V. iii. 306–7) . . . (concerning Cordelia's death)

This is the ultimate doubt about the gods' justice and providence. In

[1] Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1936, pp. 62, 114–5.

other words, it is a questioning of " nature "—whether it is malignant or benignant.

An outstanding characteristic of *King Lear* is that the value system is shattered and that no positive value is established. Therefore, it stands to reason that not only the protagonist but also many other characters repeatedly ask, " What rules the world? " The source play, *King Leir*, is a pious Christian play which glorifies Providence. Shakespeare, on the contrary, seems deliberately to place *King Lear* in heathen times so that he can boldly put the above question. Notably enough, the answers given by the various characters cover a wide range: from natural theology to a pietistic faith in gods. Edmund worships a mechanical " nature ":

> Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law
> My services are bound. (I. ii. 1–2)

Kent says,

> It is the stars,
> The stars above us, govern our conditions;
> Else one self mate and make could not beget
> Such different issues. (IV. iii. 32–5)

Albany and Edgar, in contrast with Edmund, manifest the belief in the gods' justice. Hearing of Cornwall's death, Albany exclaims,

> This shows you are above,
> You justicers, that these our nether crimes
> So speedily can venge! (IV. ii. 78–80)

Moreover, he regards the death of Goneril and Regan as " the judgment of the heavens." (V. iii. 231) Since Edgar also believes in retributive justice, he attributes Gloucester's disastrous fall to the sins of the flesh:

> The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us:
> The dark and vicious place where thee [Edmund] he got
> Cost him his eyes. (V. iii. 170–73)

Quite in opposition to Edgar's religious words, " The gods are just," Gloucester makes the following speech which is one of the most famous

passages in the play:

> As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods—
> They kill us for their sport. (IV. i. 37–8)

It is striking that such conflicting views as Edgar's and Gloucester's are both present. Which is the keynote of *King Lear?* Is the gods' way justified or arraigned? Gloucester's remark seems to be much truer to the *Lear* universe, where evil seems to prevail over good, where the seeming truth is dominant over the real truth. It is true that the total significance of the play cannot be assumed from a speech of a particular person, but Gloucester's above exclamation touches the fundamental theme of the drama. It is this real doubt about the world-picture that makes *King Lear* the most tragic of Shakespearean tragedies.

Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth have, like Lear, doubts about the world-picture. However, there is a definite difference between *King Lear* and the other tragedies. Although Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth personally experience a shattering of the value system, the world picture of the plays themselves is remarkably firm. In this connection let us first consider *Macbeth.* This drama is different from the other great tragedies in that the protagonist is a villain, like Richard III. It cannot be emphasized too much that from one point of view any tragic hero, including Macbeth, claims exemption from the social and moral judgment. Also, Shakespeare confers a moral sensitivity on Macbeth so that the audience may be involved in his tragedy. However, there coexist in the play two opposing views of Macbeth—private and public. It may safely be said that *Macbeth* has a dual aspect: the hero is at once a bloody " butcher " (V. ix. 35) in Malcolm's word, and a pathetic figure who evokes our sympathy. The play ends with a downward movement into chaos in the realm of the individual but with an upward movement in the realm of the state. In the world of *Macbeth,* where corruption has not generally spread, moral optimism is negotiable and there arises no serious doubt about the world order.

The case of *Othello* is a little different. Unlike in *Macbeth,* reality is defeated by appearance in the world of *Othello.* Notably enough, how-

ever, the chaos existing in *Othello* is personal rather than universal; this distinguishes the play from *King Lear*. However dark and disastrous *Othello* may be, the turmoil is seen only in the hero's mind, an individual world; the world-picture of the play itself is not shaken. Unlike in *King Lear*, there is neither a wide spread of evil in the whole world nor the culminating question, " What rules the world? " *Othello* is essentially a personal and domestic tragedy whose main concern lies in the revelation of character—the contrast between Othello and Iago, the deceived and the deceiver.

There is a danger of oversimplifying any Shakespearean tragedy, especially *Hamlet*, an eternal sphinx. However, a few words must be given to it. The world of *Hamlet* suffers from moral corruption, as is indicated by abundance of images of diseases. When Hamlet is faced with his mother's adultery and his uncle's act of murder, he thinks the universe chaotic and tainted. However, it is notable that after he returns from England he grows so far as to say,

> There's divinity that shapes our ends
> Rough-hew them how we will. (V. ii. 10–11)

or,

> there is a special providence in the fall of
> a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come;
> if it be not to come, it will be now; if it
> be not now, yet it will come—the readiness
> is all. (V. ii. 212–6)

These speeches indicate that he is no longer in tumult. Near the end of the play the world-picture has been re-arranged into order in Hamlet's eyes.

The above survey suggests that in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, there is a reconstruction after disintegration. Man is ultimately reconciled to the universe. On the other hand, *King Lear* is concerned with man's resistance against the forces of the universe to which he is not reconciled. Therefore, it is only natural that not a few characters repeat the word " patience," emphasizing the difficulty of achieving it. " Patience " is one of the key words in the play. Those who believe that *King Lear*

is a Christian play about the purging of Lear through suffering assert that the conclusion of the play depicts the achievement of patience by Lear and Gloucester. For example, J. F. Danby maintains that the patience referred to in the play is not stoic but Christian and that *King Lear* is "a study in patience unrewarded although achieved."[1] The most significant instances of patience are found when Lear, confronted with cruelty of Goneril and Regan, prays, "But, for true need—/ You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need" (II. iv. 269–70), and when afterwards, near Dover, he preaches to the blind Gloucester: "Thou must be patient." (IV. vi. 179) Also impressive is that speech in which Edgar warns Gloucester not to be driven to despair:

> Men must endure
> Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
> Ripeness is all. (V. ii. 9–11)

It is remarkable that the import of the word "patience" used by Lear is not entirely the same as the implication of Edgar's "endure." When Lear refers to "patience" in the above passages, he does not seem to mean Christian patience. Christianity usually accepts adversity as a scourge of God which He sends to man as punishment or discipline. However, behind Lear's words, "Thou must be patient," there is to be seen not such a religious consciousness but a clear-sighted recognition of the illogicality and cruelty of the world on the secular level:

> When we are born, we cry that we are come
> To this great stage of fools. (IV. vi. 183–4)

Nor can we rigidly define the patience which Lear strives for as a stoic one. On the other hand, Edgar's speech quoted before means that man must await the destined hour of death. This is different from stoicism, which sanctions suicide, and may be akin to Christian patience. It seems

[1] J. F. Danby, "*King Lear* and Christian Patience: A Culmination," *Poets on Fortune's Hill*, London, Faber and Faber, 1952, p. 105.

I. Ribner and G. I. Duthie hold the same opinion as Danby. Ribner, *op. cit.*, p. 130; Duthie, *op. cit.*, p. xxxv. In opposition to them, H. Haydn and W. Rosen say that Lear tries to achieve *stoic* endurance. Haydn, *op. cit.*, p. 667; William Rosen, *Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 38.

unfruitful to discuss "-isms," to discuss whether the "patience" referred to in *King Lear* is on the whole Christian patience or a stoic one. As the word "patience" is used with different nuances in different places, it must be examined contextually. What must be noted most especially is that Lear and Gloucester do not succeed in attaining any patience though they do their best. Lear goes mad from impatience; in the end he kills the man who murdered Cordelia and then dies in agony. Gloucester, who attempts suicide from despair, also fails to achieve patience. Danby's assertion that *King Lear* is "a study of patience unrewarded although achieved" seems far-fetched. Rather, *King Lear* deals with the difficulty of achieving patience. It is not a "Book of Job." The vision of *King Lear* is not so much Judaic as Hellenic, not so much Christian as humanistic.

Recently it has become popular to give *King Lear* a Christian interpretation. In this view the true subject and conclusion of the play is the purgation of Lear through suffering. This interpretation involves the danger of reducing the drama to an example of the theological concept of pain. The Christian reading of the play has become dominant only in this century. It is worth noticing that the drama was generally thought to be the darkest tragedy in, for example, the 18th century which brought forth, because of its closeness to the Elizabethan period, much illuminating criticism of Shakespeare. The recent tendency to make of *King Lear* a "kind of commedia"[1] about human salvation seems to be a distortion, judging from the following two points. First, Lear's regeneration cannot be easily asserted. It is true that, as I established in Chapter I, Lear through suffering acquires self-knowledge

[1] R. A. Fraser, *Shakespeare's Poetics in Relation to "King Lear,"* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962, p. 131.

There are many critics who regard the conclusion of the play as an affirmation of positive values, especially love. e.g., Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 209; Ribner, *op. cit.*, p.136; Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, p. 204; Duthie, *op. cit.*, p. xix; Knights, *op. cit.*, p. 116; Knight, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

On the other hand, there are some, such as Empson, D. G. James, and Holloway, who, in opposition to the above view, maintain that *King Lear* is an utter tragedy without any final assertion. Empson, *op. cit.*, pp. 153, 156; James, *op. cit.*, pp. 119–21; John Holloway, *The Story of Night*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, pp. 91, 94–5.

and insight into reality near the end. However, the above interpretation is possible only if the play ends in IV. vii., where there is to be found a hint of Lear's redemption through his reunion with Cordelia. However, the action of the play then ironically reverses itself. The pietistic interpretation fails to explain sufficiently the peculiar arbitrariness of the *dénouement*. As to Cordelia's death, it is, in my view, unconvincing to say that " Cordelia spiritually lives on "[1] or " the more unmotivated, unmerited, senseless, monstrous, her fate, the more do we feel that it does not concern her."[2] Such thinking ignores the fact that Lear, a victim of evil, dies in agony doubting the gods ' justice.

Secondly, let us suppose for a moment that Lear personally does experience regeneration, as is often claimed. This hypothesis does not necessarily lead to the view that *King Lear* is a play about human salvation. Even if there is a regeneration of the hero, it is probable that the question raised by *King Lear* is still unresolved and that the play does not allow a pietistic reading. The pietistic view tends to concentrate on Lear's inner development and treats the peculiarities of the *Lear* universe as a whole too lightly. If we want to approach *King Lear* comprehensively, we need to consider not only the transformation of the vision of the protagonist but also the universe in which that hero and the other characters live. Lear's essential tragedy is that he is thrown into a universe which is moved not by Cordelia but by Edmund, Goneril, and Regan. Danby speaks to the point when he says that the " central truth of *King Lear* " is " that the good man needs a community of goodness," and that the theme of the play is " the Good Man in the Bad Society."[3] However penitent Lear may become, there is no salvation as long as the *Lear* universe remains as it is.

In contrast with the Christian interpretation, there is a view that considers *King Lear* as an outburst of despair. However, this seems also to distort the work. Though the world-picture presented in the play is terrifying, the tone is neither desperate nor cynical. In this

[1] Ribner, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[2] Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp. 325–6.

[3] Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, pp. 209–10.

point *King Lear* is different from *Timon of Athens* and *Troilus and Cressida*. *King Lear* abundantly evokes tragic emotion and has the effect of catharsis. Sometimes it is said that tragic emotion springs from an equilibrium between two contrary readings of the universe: a balance between a chaotic universe and a divinely controlled universe, or between evil and hidden yet immanent good.[1] However, this opinion seeks too much to reconcile the tragic and the Christian pictures of life, as Clifford Leech rightly criticizes.[2] *King Lear* is a candid exploration of a chaotic universe and of evil. When inscrutable human destiny is shown, when Gloucester's words, " As flies to wanton boys are we to th ' gods—/ They kill us for their sport " (IV. i. 37–3) ring out, we cannot but feel fear and pity. But we are not driven to despair. Man is dignified and ennobled by his conflict with his circumstances. *King Lear* is neither a Christian play which tells about the purgation of Lear through suffering nor does it present an outburst of despair. It is a humanistic play about the suffering of man in a severe world.

Conclusion

King Lear reveals the zenith of Shakespeare's tragic vision as it develops the theme of the difference between appearance and reality. Lear's tragedy begins when he loses his own identity, asking, " Who am I? " (I. iv. 229); after this the process of Lear's quest for identity is traced. Through extreme suffering, even at the cost of his sanity, he discovers the reality of man, which is symbolized by the naked wretch, the Bedlam beggar. Lear's suffering never ends, since he cannot reconcile himself to the universe, " this tough world." (V. iii. 314) In the *Lear* universe the seeming truth prevails over the real truth. It is such a stern world-picture that makes *King Lear* the most tragic of all Shakespearean dramas. Unlike the other tragedies, the value system is shattered and no positive value is established. Though a Christian

[1] Una, Ellis-Fermor, *The Frontiers of Drama*, London, Methuen, 1945, p. 128.

[2] Clifford Leech, *Shakespeare's Tragedies and Other Studies in Seventeenth Century Drama*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1961, p. 8.

reading of the play is somewhat popular today, it is not supported by the real nature of the *Lear* universe. The conclusion of the play does not present the purgation of Lear through suffering, but rather suffering itself which knows no end. The play is not an example of a theological concept of pain. The vision of *King Lear* is not to much Christian as humanistic.

The main concern of *King Lear* is to see things as they really are, to face the naked reality of human nature and of the universe. Shakespeare renders life as it is, not as we should like it to be. Although the word " pessimistic " is sometimes attributed to *King Lear*, Shakespeare's attitude is too tough to be called pessimistic. Rather, " realistic " is more appropriate to describe it. The drama does not offer a trivial remedy. *King Lear* is concerned with understanding the reality of things, holding " the mirror up to nature." (*Hamlet*, II. ii. 24) " Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say " (V. iii. 324)—these words sum up Shakespeare's fundamental attitude. He does not flinch from presenting things as they really are, however dismal they may be. It is too much to say that " Shakespeare was on the verge of madness "[1] while he was writing *King Lear*. However, we can safely admit that he was " most earnest "[2] when he wrote it. It is in *King Lear* that Shakespeare reached his tragic summit. Therefore, it is only natural that after *King Lear* he no longer dared to undertake a deep tragedy. After *King Lear* we have *Timon of Athens*, a stillborn twin of *King Lear*, and the Roman plays, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, which belong to another type than deep tragedy.[3] *King Lear* has indeed a crucial place in Shakespeare's inner biography by revealing the crystallization of his tragic vision.

[1] J. M. Murry, *Shakespeare*, London, Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1936, p. 338.

[2] William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, The World's Classics, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 118.

[3] Cf. Introduction, p. 5.

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